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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/08/2028
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SUBJECT: PARAGUAY SHAKES UP SECURITY FORCES LEADERSHIP

Classified By: DCM Michael J. Fitzpatrick for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Lugo administration in late November appointed new leadership in the Military Forces and the National Police in the biggest change in Paraguay's security apparatus in decades. By retiring many scores of security officials and promoting a new cadre of leaders, the Lugo administration reaffirmed civilian political control over the use of force, reinforced efforts at institutional reform and decreased corruption in the security forces. Newly appointed Military Forces Commander Benitez and Police Commissioner Machado are experienced officials who appear favorably disposed to the United States. Given tight budgets, institutional corruption and rising crime, they certainly have their work cut out for them. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) President Lugo replaced Military Forces Commander General Bernardino Soto with Rear Admiral Cibar Benitez Caceres November 19, slightly before the military's normal December leadership rotation. The following day, Benitez signed an order reorganizing the military's leadership and retiring 33 members of Paraguay's top brass. The new leadership is: Brigadier General Alfredo Machuca Doldan as Army commander; Coronel Dario Davlos Nunez as Air Force commander; and Rear Admiral Ruben Valdez Cuellar as Navy commander. Although Benitez signed the order, DATT sources indicated November 21 that Defense Minister Luis Bareiro Spaini and President Fernando Lugo's chief of staff, Michael Lopez Perito, drafted the order. Although Paraguayan military tradition stipulates that senior officers retire when a more junior officer is promoted above them, the selection of an officer as junior as Benitez as Military Forces commander is unprecedented.

13. (U) Following prosecutors' announcement November 24 that they were investigating allegations of widespread corruption in the National Police, Interior Minister Rafael Filizzola dismissed Police Commissioner Federico Acuna and Deputy Police Commissioner Celso Benitez, claiming that their anti-corruption efforts had been lackluster. (NOTE: Acuna and Benitez assumed leadership of the National Police August 15 and served just 99 days in office. END NOTE.) In their place, Filizzola named Viviano Machado, a 30-year police veteran, as the new police commissioner, and Nestor Baez as deputy police commissioner. Paraguayan police tradition also calls for senior officers to retire when a more junior officer is promoted above them, and Machado's selection as police commissioner forces the retirement of numerous police officers. (Minister Filizzola told Ambassador and DCM that it was a painful decision to sack Acuna, a boyhood friend of President Lugo and "one of the most honest people in national public service," because he was unable or unwilling to

frontally attack police corruption. Filizzola was proud of having authorized the prosecutor's raids on the accounting office at police headquarters-- which he called a first in Paraguayan history.)

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: By retiring hundreds of security officials and promoting a new cadre of leaders, the Lugo administration made clear that these historically autonomous institutions must respond to national political direction. The moves also created an impetus to implement institutional reform and to decrease corruption in the security forces. Benitez and Machado are experienced officials who appear favorably disposed to the United States. After 61 years of Colorado rule, the changes in leadership are largely viewed as positive, since most high-level security officials were Colorado insiders. Given widespread police corruption and citizen concerns regarding crime, Paraguay's new military and police leadership will need to demonstrate that it can carry out serious internal reforms while improving Paraguay's security situation. END COMMENT.

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